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Media Education in India
Policy and Praxis in Old and New Communication Media

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Introduction

In the twenty-first century, there has been a massive proliferation of media technologies and media channels that have thrown open large swaths of Indian society to the influence of media, even in the absence of holistic media educational policies. While this chapter is cognizant of the dearth of scientific literature on Indian media education, with the research available, it attempts to delve into the confused beginnings of media education in India, beginning with earlier communication media that then led to new media, finally exploring a critique of the gap between policy and praxis. It is important for readers from other world regions to recognize that in a country such as India, where access to technology varies dramatically and where profound economic disparities exist, older media has not been entirely replaced by new media, but rather augmented. For many, especially the rural poor, radio, television, and print media are still predominant, whereas newer media are more prevalent for wealthier, younger, and more urban citizens.

Although the practice of media education has been prevalent in India since colonial times, the manner in which it has been understood differs from Western approaches (Kumar 1995). This chapter highlights the ways in which media education has been understood in India and interprets the significance of different approaches. A review of the existing literature indicates that media education, as a supplement to the educational requirements of both academic and vocational education, has not realized anticipated outcomes in either the educational sector or the realm of educational media produced in various formats for specific target groups by private television channels and state-driven media.

Confused Beginnings to Media Education in India

Western scholars consider media education an important tool for rapid educational transformation as well as for the pursuit of national economic development. Countries with an advanced industrial infrastructure, such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Japan, have all used both television and radio as part of their media policy for improving educational experiences at the classroom level. Examples include the BBC and the NHK. In India, too, radio and television have been the primary tools for supplementing classroom education as well as enhancing the quality of teaching toward the rapid development of basic literacy rates (rather than merely for the sake of critical media literacy). However, the implementation of these programs was largely facilitated without any accompanying media policy. As such, the roots of media education in India are highly divergent, with no uniting aim toward short or long-term goals. No clear distinctions were drawn in terms of the objectives, vision, or mission of educative programs meant for various distinct groups such as farmers, industrial workers, women, or children.

These educational programs ended abruptly during the 1990s after having operated for several decades, giving the impression that the programs had failed to yield desired results. Although no specific rationale emerged, a sensational 1995 Supreme Court judgment that freed the airwaves from a state monopoly seems to have been a central motivator. Following this judgment, the Government of India initiated steps to restructure All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan (DD), giving up aims toward social consciousness as there was neither policy nor praxis to shield current initiatives from reform.

That said, hardly any research has been done on the outcomes of media education in India or on this pivotal shift. There were no government documents reflecting on the status of media education in India up until this point. However, Chu and Schramm's research from the 1970s, perhaps the only of its kind, throws some light on the outcomes of media education programs in India at that time. Chu and Schramm (1979) carried out the most comprehensive global review of research on the relative success of strategies for educational television and radio. The results of their studies established that those who used media education programs to supplement classroom learning had better scores than control groups not using these programs (1979, p. 35). Similar studies conducted by the Japanese Broadcasting Authority (Jamison et al. 1973; NHK 1965; Murthy 2007) in Japanese schools found that where radio programs for school children were implemented from 1960 to 1968, the students started showing better performance on the tests conducted versus children in control groups (Murthy 2007, p. 77).

Kumar (2000), in his doctoral studies at Leicester University in 1988, was the first scholar to point out the confusion among various sectors of Indian society relating to the interpretation of media education, going on to evaluate the outcomes of these interpretations. Indian scholars largely interpreted media education as a distinct process apart from media technology as well as the professional use of media in education (Kumar 2000). In Kumar's view, he argued that

> … media education is critical social analysis of the media so as to further awareness and
> understanding of how the media work, who really controls and fashions them, the role
> of professionals as well as advertising, marketing and public relations in shaping their

content, and the different ways in which audiences interpret the messages of the media. (2000, pp. 251–252)

He added that

> The primary goals of Media Education are thus the conscientization, empowerment and liberation of the community and of society as a whole. Its concerns are the promotion of equality, social justice, democracy, freedom, human dignity and a more humane society. The methods or strategies it employs are dialogue, reflection and action. (2000, pp. 251–252)

During the colonial period, in both print and radio, there were various campaigns contributing to the struggle for freedom from British colonial rule. Thus, despite the hesitancy of Indian scholars to identify media education with more broad movements for social and democratic change, Kumar's (2000) critical definition of media education appears to fit both developing and developed countries as a unique paradigm that exhibits parallel motions within both contexts. However, based on research conducted in Bombay, Kumar (2000) opined that "Media education in [the] Indian context was primarily meant to supplement the educational needs at classroom level through the deployment of radio and television as instruments of learning" (2000, pp. 256–257). In other studies (1995; 2000), Kumar does not seem to further his own definition relating to the potentially far-reaching sociological significance of media education within the Indian education system.

Old Communication Media

Cinema's Role in Enhancing Awareness

Kumar (2000) recognized Indian cinema as a catalyst of social awareness. Murthy and Das (2011) have shown the ways in which early Indian cinema was imbued with patriotic fervor as well as a consciousness of caste discrimination. They describe how Indian cinema, especially Telugu and Hindi cinema, succeeded in encouraging tangible social and behavioral changes (Murthy 2015). Their article, originally published in 2011, reappeared as a front-page story in *The Communication Initiative Network*, the newsletter of a UN body, on March 8, 2018 (Murthy 2018). Other scholars of Indian film studies (Rajadhyaksha 2013; Madhava Prasad 1995; Vasudevan 2013) have offered critiques of early Indian cinema's contributions to positive change during the colonial period; these were largely based on Marxist thought and Western psychology.

Radio in the Colonial to Post-Colonial Period

During the colonial period, the large-scale establishment of radio in India was quite rapid. Murthy (2007), in speaking of the global revolutionary role radio communication technologies played in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, describes how

radio and later portable forms such as the "transistor" ignited human awareness and imagination across the globe. He also found that the development of radio and cinema in India paralleled similar developments in the West (Murthy 2007).

If one looks at the genesis of radio in India retrospectively, it may offer insights into the medium as it relates to information, enlightenment, and communication. Radio broadcasting began in India in 1923 under the privately operated Indian Broadcasting Company. Before the end of British rule in India, radio not only moved from the private to the government sector but also expanded by several cities. More widespread use of radio began with the introduction of "radio clubs" in Bombay (July 1927) and Calcutta (August 1927). Interestingly, these radio clubs, as well as the present community radio stations, have a number of characteristics in common: (i) both of them operate in the private sector under license from the central government; (ii) both carry out entertainment programs in various formats but cannot air news; (iii) they run for limited hours. However, the radio clubs (running from 1923 to 1927) were primarily meant for elite groups living in cities, while community radio is meant to cater to vocational groups in rural India today. Since that time, radio has undoubtedly been the leader in galvanizing Indian media education, not only through the dissemination of news but also through various forms of edutainment such as dramas, songs, ballads, children programs, activities for labor and industry, clubs for farmers and peasants, women's programs, and religious and literary programs.

In recent times, radio in India has come full circle with the first community radio station Anna FM coming onto the air on February 1, 2004, following the Government of India's policy to privatize radio waves. While community radio in India fails to perform, except for a few cases, private commercial FM stations attract masses of listeners in both urban and semi-urban areas. Though community radio is meant to cater to vocational and professional groups in rural India, its performance is hindered by obvious constraints such as limited overall funds, limited revenue from advertising, and limited coverage areas, among other difficulties (Valecha and Ohja 2018). If one looks at community radio programs associated with non-governmental institutions or universities, the total performance and quality of programs lack mass appeal. There are no independent agencies or academic bodies to analyze or oversee their quality or content (Valecha and Ohja 2018). Looking full circle at the progression of Indian radio history, structural and functional developments in the medium also reflect the successive establishment of other media institutions, ranging from FM radio to television.

Post-Globalization Television

The entry of television into India in 1959 was much later than print, radio, or cinema. Early Indian television was established with the sole aim of catering to the educational needs of school-aged children and their teachers. Until the 1980s, the widespread adoption of television faced an uneven progression in Indian society. It was forced to overcome several hurdles, including both financial and technological obstacles.

However, research on television educational programs conducted via the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) from 1975 to 1976 led to a consensus on the usefulness of television programming. In keeping with these findings, the Ministry of Human Resource Development established a television channel whose exclusive purpose was to relay educational programs for students enrolled in the non-formal education sector. Post-1980s, India began to take larger strides. Color television and the spread of television networks across India led to the most rapid expansion of television to date. Following the process of globalization in the 1990s, private television networks entered the field, offering extensive entertainment packages including such options as reality TV, music competitions, and serials, which took away from the monopoly of the government-run DD. The marketing of television brands, coupled with emerging technologies, made home theaters a reality in India. Today, India prides itself on having television that is among the most advanced in developed nations. While some private channels offer educational programs, access to both entertainment and empowerment comes from over 1100 television channels and serves as the core of media education. Rogers has described what we see offered on this extensive network of channels as primarily "edutainment" (Rogers 1999), but outside of Rogers's short-term research on the DD teleserial *Hum Log*, there is no research on available educative materials.

New Communication Media

Post millennium, there has been an exponential proliferation of technologies resulting in communication tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, and Pinterest, among others. Operating online via the internet, they subsume multiple media applications such as animation and graphics. These multimedia environments exist primarily as methods of social interaction and are most commonly referred to as *social media platforms*. Mobile phones have largely replaced computers as the most accessible means of online media access, becoming effective tools for disseminating messages via new media paradigms. Compared to the old communication media of print, radio, television, and cinema, alternative media and social media platforms are easily accessible to the general public. Today, India has the largest pool of Facebook users in the world, next to China. In terms of internet penetration, India continues to register increasing subscriptions to the internet, which raises a critical issue regarding the shifting role and responsibility of media education as it moves from old to new paradigms. It also raises concerns about how to increase media literacy levels in keeping with the exponential growth of online media, beset with the issue of contending with new paradigms of communication. However, media education happening through social media on mobile phones is both low-cost and direct. Again, the usefulness of new media platforms for media education in India requires further research. Current research conducted on social media platforms has failed to definitively prove its usefulness for positive social change, let alone for the establishment of media educational programs.

The Gap Between Policy and Praxis, Old and New Communication Media

Indian media education remains directionless, without a unifying policy or proper definition. Despite the unprecedented growth of print, radio, and television, the Government of India has failed to develop a comprehensive media education policy covering both format and delivery. The Indian government has also failed to decide what types of initiatives should fall under the umbrella of media education as a discipline or where the emphasis of media education should be placed. This is of special importance as old, centrally controlled mass media is being displaced by multi-sited social media platforms. Although *media education* as an umbrella term is inclusive of journalism education and educational technology, its role as a tool in galvanizing Indian society into a vibrant nation has not yet been envisioned. It is here that the early definition of Kumar (1988) for media education might occupy center stage.

While media education through radio and television continues even now through governmental as well as private television channels, in order to supplement the educational needs of classrooms, a specific or comprehensive media policy covering various target groups located in rural, semi-urban, and urban settings is still needed. Furthermore, there is confusion in India regarding the distinction between media literacy and media education, especially as it relates to changing communication paradigms. In fact, media literacy and media education are not one and the same. *Media literacy* in the current Indian context relates to imparting basic skills and awareness of how to utilize current technologies, not to mention the use of information and communication technology (ICT) systems for e-learning. It is seen as a tool for enabling target groups to become able to use current technologies and online platforms. By contrast, *media education* is seen as a supplement to students and teachers through the use of both radio and television in the classroom. A unifying media education policy should not only draw a distinction between these two forms of education but also recognize the convergence of old and new media in India today. Any policy must further address the objectives and goals of media education as a means to enhance the conscientization of media audiences and producers within a democratic society. There is a gap between the praxis of both media literacy and media education. The lack of research on this gap and how to connect the two in the pursuit of a modern media educational policy is the crux of this critique.

The Government of India has passed various acts and amendments to regulate new media but has failed to create a unifying policy that connects both forms of education in the pursuit of a meaningful, productive media education policy. For instance, the central government could work out a strategic plan with state governments as to how to effectively use cinema and television to enhance the conscientization, empowerment, and liberation of Indian society as a whole (Kumar 2000). Such policies must demonstrate concern for the ways that the government can augment equality, social justice, democracy, freedom, and human dignity as well as developing a more humane global society.

In the period since the 1984 National Educational Policy, no national media policy has emerged with the potential to influence and empower all sections of society. There is no common direction between national institutions such as universities,

autonomous colleges, and regional bodies with regard to how they can bridge the gap between praxis and policy, or how to integrate the two distinct paradigms of media literacy and education into a singular media policy. As Kumar (2000) rightly points out, research on media education has, by and large, remained limited to an evaluation of the performance of educational technology at school and college levels. On the other hand, the disciplines of professional journalism and communications remain in total disarray (Murthy 2011). As a result, the gap between old and new communication paradigms continues to widen, which only serves to erode the pursuit of a national educational policy.

Conclusion

This chapter details the vagaries and inconsistencies of the term *media education* in India. It includes a brief overview of Indian media education and research through the lens of cinema, print, radio, and television. It also brings attention to the lack of policy in media education and research in India. It further draws a distinction between old and new paradigms in media education and posits that, if a national policy comes forth, it should bridge the gap between the policy and praxis between old and new communication media as well as media literacy and education as disciplines. A policy so framed should help promote broader conscientization of the role of the media in Indian society and encourage democratic social development.

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